



Ho (Lawrence K.K.), Chu (Yiu Kong), *Policing Hong Kong 1842-1969 : Insiders' Stories*

Hong Kong, City University of Hong Kong Press, 2012, 299 pp., ISBN 978962372064

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/1508>

DOI: 10.4000/chs.1508

ISSN: 1663-4837

Publisher

Librairie Droz

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 October 2014

Number of pages: 132-134

ISBN: 978-2-600-01854-8

ISSN: 1422-0857

Electronic reference

Clive Emsley, « Ho (Lawrence K.K.), Chu (Yiu Kong), *Policing Hong Kong 1842-1969 : Insiders' Stories* », *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* [Online], Vol. 18, n°2 | 2014, Online since 10 April 2015, connection on 22 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/1508> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/chs.1508>

This text was automatically generated on 22 September 2020.

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- 1 In 1842 the British and Chinese governments signed the Treaty of Nanking and the tiny island of Hong Kong became a British colony. The island was situated on a major entry point to China and, in addition to its population of around 6000, mainly fishermen and charcoal workers, it was also the haunt of pirates. For the British it was to be a major *entrepôt* for the Chinese trade. But the smooth passage of goods is best served by order and tranquillity ; the pirates had to be dealt with, and the British also considered that a police institution was necessary to enforce and maintain their version of order on the territory and the subsequent additions of new, similarly small territories on the mainland. The development of this police institution is the subject of Ho and Chu's illuminating and stimulating book.
- 2 The book is divided into three sections. The first provides a broad chronology ; the second, which slides beyond the closing date in the title, focuses on different branches of the police such as the Criminal Investigation Department, riot squads, and the recruitment and deployment of women officers. The final section surveys the careers of five senior figures in the force and is based largely on interviews with these men. The book was written with both a popular readership and an academic audience in mind. It is copiously illustrated with photographs and with quotation, often isolated from the

main text, drawn from interviews with eighty former officers. This tends to privilege the second half of the twentieth century in the narrative which may disappoint some of the academic audience. But for those of us with no grasp of Chinese – and a large number of the publications in the bibliography are in Chinese – it is immensely valuable to have an account of the way in which the British sought to police the colony. It might be expected that most senior officers were drawn from Britain, but perhaps more surprising is the way that, for most of the period of the book, the British limited the employment of the indigenous people and recruited men from the Indian subcontinent. When the government of India refused to support such recruitment following independence, the British turned to Pakistan with two campaigns for officers in 1952 and 1961. At one point, at the beginning of the 1930s, they even employed White Russians in an anti-piracy squad.

- 3 There is not much in the book on how the police dealt with basic, often petty criminal offending. This is a pity since it was probably as a result of this kind of criminality that corruption thrived ; and corruption appears to have been endemic within the force until a major crack-down in the mid-1970s. One of the retired officers whose life history is described, and who is quoted extensively in the final section, also talks about Kowloon Walled City which appears to have resembled something like a *cour des miracles* that the police patrolled with caution and contained rather than sought to suppress. Elsewhere there is also much fascinating information that cries out for longer and more extensive exposition and assessment. As noted above, for much of the period up until the Second World War, British and Indian police officers outnumbered the Chinese officers. Many of the first Chinese policemen were watchmen recruited at the behest of local community groups and significantly funded by these groups. They were also separate from the Police administration and managed by the Secretary for Chinese Affairs. Europeans in Hong Kong were wary of letting the Chinese police patrol in their districts and, at least initially, of authorising them to carry firearms. Only after 1945 was there a positive effort to increase Chinese personnel ; even so, the last intake of British (or at least English-speaking, white European) junior inspectors for supervisory and managerial roles was in 1994, just three years before the colony was returned to Chinese rule.
- 4 Equally interesting, and worth an extended study, is the policing of the colony under Japanese occupation. Some of the Indian police were deployed by the Japanese as guards of British prisoners of war. Some Chinese officers continued to serve under the Japanese while other, new men, were recruited ; and this poses interesting issues about the interaction between loyalties and the economic situation on the island under occupation. Turbulence in south-east Asia during the decades after the Second World War also had repercussions for Hong Kong and brought extensive new problems for its police ; the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution led to floods of refugees ; these were followed by fugitives from the nationalist victory in Vietnam, the so-called 'boat-people'.
- 5 The Hong Kong Police were in a difficult position during the half century between the Communist take-over in Beijing and the end of colonial status. Alongside British troops they patrolled the frontier where the situation could be explosive ; in July 1967 six police officers were shot and killed by members of the People's Militia on the frontier at Sha Tau Kok. The marine section of the police fished bodies and body-parts from the sea ; many of the dead appear to have been victims of the violence of the Cultural

Revolution in and around Guangdong. The same marine section was also involved in semi-clandestine deportations back to the mainland ; the 'criminals' and others were given a loaf of bread and some cigarettes and shipped to remote border areas. At the same time the Communist Party in Hong Kong was taking a leading role in agitation within trade unions and around a clutch of economic and social issues such as fare increases, lack of housing and police corruption. The undoubted success of the Hong Kong Police in clamping down on corruption and in handling massive protest demonstrations and riots from the mid-1960s is an area that has been touched on by others, not least because its riot tactics were of interest to police elsewhere, notably in Canada and the United Kingdom.

- 6 Among the men that the authors interviewed was Dick Lee who joined the force as a Chinese university graduate in 1972 and became Commissioner in 2003. Lee spent two years as an instructor at the United Kingdom's Police Staff College in the early 1990s. "In the old days", he recalled, "our colleagues had a low regard for the local service, thinking it wasn't up to scratch compared to Western counterparts. Two years in Britain laid those biases to rest." Lee considered that this experience gave him, and his force, the confidence to pursue their own agendas. Ho and Chu themselves might consider pursuing a new agenda when it comes to the broad sweep of police history with which they conclude and within which they seek to situate the Hong Kong force. They tend to accept the traditional British Whig interpretation of London's Metropolitan Police being the first modern police and the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) providing a model for colonial forces. Yet their description of the origins and development of the Hong Kong force does not suggest anyone pursuing an Irish model. Plenty of British forces recruited outsiders believing it best for strangers to police strangers. And if physical force was the mark of the RIC it is worth remembering that David H. Bayley has argued for force being the distinctive element of all police institutions ; moreover many people living in poor working-class districts or participating in strikes and demonstrations in England since 1829, might be surprised by the suggestion that the ordinary British Bobby was generally mild, polite and in control of his temper. There has been significant rethinking of the British police model in recent years ; this thinking now needs to be extended to incorporate colonial police and their successors.

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